



Navigating Modernity: Consumer Perceptions of Awadhi Culinary Heritage Through a Sociodemographic Lens

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Abstract— This study investigates how consumers in Lucknow City perceive traditional Awadhi food, critically examining these perceptions within the context of modernity's influence and the diverse sociodemographic profiles of urban dwellers. Recognizing Awadhi cuisine's profound cultural significance and its burgeoning potential for gastronomic tourism, the research seeks to understand its contemporary resonance. An extensive literature review, encompassing over 50 academic articles, systematically identified 18 salient variables influencing consumer food choices, such as authenticity, quality, flavor, price, and perceived health benefits, all operationalized for this empirical investigation. The primary objectives were to discern the critical factors driving consumer choices for traditional Awadhi food and to delineate contemporary consumer perceptions of this distinct regional cuisine. Employing a quantitative research design, data were meticulously collected from 250 consumers via a structured online questionnaire, utilizing a five-point Likert scale. Following rigorous pilot testing to ensure instrument validity and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.981), factor analysis was applied to the collected data using SPSS. The analysis yielded a robust three-factor solution, collectively explaining 95.847% of the total variance, thus providing a parsimonious representation of underlying perceptual structures. Findings indicate that Awadhi cuisine is predominantly perceived as highly flavoursome, of superior quality, authentically prepared, distinguished by unique recipes, and a significant promoter of local tourism. Conversely, a notable perception suggests it is complex to prepare and generally associated with a higher price point. These comprehensive insights offer actionable strategies for stakeholders within the hospitality and tourism sectors to strategically enhance the promotion, accessibility, and sustained cultural and economic value of Awadhi cuisine in an era of rapid social and economic change.

Keywords— Awadhi food, consumer perception, traditional cuisine, food choices, cultural heritage, tourism, modernity, socio-demographic.

I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, consumer perceptions of food are shaped by a complex interplay of conscious and subconscious factors, including affordability, convenience, health benefits, and organoleptic qualities, alongside individual beliefs,

attitudes, and socio-cultural backgrounds (Chen & Antonelli, 2020; Monterrosa et al., 2020). These diverse motivations are critical for market success, with health, weight management, hedonic enjoyment, ethics, and ease of preparation being significant determinants for modern consumers (Geuens, 2023;

Konttinen et al., 2021). Safety and transparency are also increasingly prioritized by those navigating contemporary food choices (Bussel et al., 2022; Cardello et al., 2007).

Within this framework, there's a growing global interest in traditional and regional foods, often driven by a societal response to industrialization, environmental concerns, and the homogenizing forces of modernity (Kristia et al., 2024; Zocchi & Fontefrancesco, 2020). Traditional foods transcend mere sustenance; they are cultural artifacts, embodying heritage, identity, and community practices (Pivarski et al., 2023; Rocillo-Aquino et al., 2021). Consumers are drawn to their authenticity, unique origins, distinct traditions, and perceived quality, alongside their sustainability potential. These foods, often relying on natural, local ingredients and artisanal methods, offer significant social, cultural, and economic value beyond nutrition (Etale & Siegrist, 2021; House et al., 2023; Zocchi & Fontefrancesco, 2020).

Awadh, historically known for its rich cultural and culinary legacy, developed a distinctive cuisine through the royal kitchens of its Nawabs (Ghosh, 2022; Roy, 2009; Singh & Jafri, 2011). Characterized by sophisticated slow-cooking techniques like "Dum" and "Dhungar," Awadhi cuisine is a prominent cultural feature. This research aims to understand how this deeply rooted culinary heritage is perceived by contemporary consumers in Lucknow, specifically examining the sociodemographic factors that influence these perceptions as the city itself navigates modernity. By exploring this specific tradition through a sociodemographic lens, this study seeks to enhance understanding of consumers' perception regarding traditional regional foods in a rapidly evolving urban landscape.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptualizing Traditional Food in Modern Contexts

Traditional food is a multifarious construct that encapsulates the historical, cultural, and geographical essence of a community. It extends beyond mere ingredients, representing a culmination of time-honored methods, cherished customs, and a distinct regional identity. The integration of "traditional" into

a food product can stem from unique preparation techniques or a profound connection to a specific geographical origin. Given that the attribute of "tradition" is not directly discernible through sensory characteristics, modern consumers frequently rely on extrinsic cues such as labels or certifications to ascertain authenticity. This perceived authenticity holds substantial value, particularly within the domain of culinary tourism, where local cuisine is recognized as a fundamental component of a destination's identity, thereby enriching the tourist experience and contributing to local economic sustainability (Bardhi et al., 2010; Brokaj, 2014; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Nair et al., 2020; Peulić et al., 2023).

Traditional foods are often passed down through generations, reflecting the customs and traditions of a particular community or country, making them an inalienable part of cultural heritage and identity. The appeal of traditional products frequently stems from their perceived authenticity, which is strongly connected with origin and naturalness. The concept of traditional food itself often involves dimensions of time, place, know-how, and cultural meaning. Despite its allure, engaging with unfamiliar culinary traditions can present challenges for consumers. Travelers, for instance, frequently rely on their existing knowledge to navigate local food options, which may limit their exploratory behavior.

2.2 Consumers' Perception Towards Traditional Food and Cuisine in a Modernizing Society

The growing interest in traditional food can be attributed to various societal shifts, including concerns over food crises, industrialization, globalization, and environmental issues—all hallmarks of modernity. Researchers have highlighted several key motivations for consuming traditional local food, such as reducing perceived health risks, rediscovering authentic flavors, aligning with environmental concerns, and fostering social bonds through interaction with producers and other consumers (Haghighian et al., 2021; Soare et al., 2023). Modern consumers are increasingly seeking products free from artificial additives, preservatives, and synthetic ingredients, driven by health and sustainability concerns and a desire for greater transparency in food production processes. These traditional options are often perceived as healthier

alternatives to heavily processed options, typically made using natural, fresh, local, and seasonal ingredients with artisanal production methods and time-consuming processes like slow cooking, which contribute to their unique characteristics and quality.

Quality is consistently identified as an essential attribute influencing consumer decisions regarding traditional foods (Peulić et al., 2023; Soare et al., 2023). Furthermore, authenticity remains a paramount criterion, with consumers preferring products made using traditional methods and ingredients, and often associating them with a particular geographic region or small-scale producers. The source of food also plays a significant role, as many consumers favor local or regional traditional products, believing them to be superior to those from other areas. This aligns with findings that consumers prioritize traditional production processes and value specific geographic origins.

Cultural background is a pivotal element that profoundly modulates consumer behavior, tastes, and preferences regarding food, making it a key component of the sociodemographic lens (Jayasinghe et al., 2025; Jeong & Lee, 2021; Lindsey, 2024). Food serves as a symbol of personal identity, group affiliation, and cultural identity. Learning processes, both explicit and implicit, transmit information about values and attitudes for food and eating, contributing to the relative stability of food practices over time.

Familiarity with a product is a critical driver in the purchase and consumption process, as it mitigates uncertainty and aligns consumer expectations with actual product characteristics. While national culture is important, social, demographic, and economic factors, alongside individual experiences, must also be considered to fully explain differences in food acceptability across cultures (Ajetunmobi & Laobangdisa, 2024; Jeong & Lee, 2021). For tourists, price is highly influential in shaping their satisfaction with local food experiences, followed by the affective image of food and its uniqueness and cultural heritage (Chowdhury & Narang, 2015; Muskat et al., 2019). Consumers perceive product authenticity by analyzing characteristics and purchase situations based on uniqueness, cultural or traditional association, production process characteristics, and specific extrinsic attributes such as branding and origin. This underscores the importance of highlighting the distinct cultural narrative and authentic preparation methods of traditional cuisines like Awadhi food to attract and satisfy modern consumers. The quest for authenticity is often seen in the search for traditional and local foods, where consuming local food means "consuming the meaning behind it" (Morris et al., 2020; Nair et al., 2020). Several academic studies have elucidated various variables that influence consumer food choices illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Variables Influencing Consumers' Food Choices

Sr.No.	Motivational Variables for food choice	Author/s
1.	Better taste	Drewnowski (1997)
2.	Health beneficial	Kozup et al. (2003)
3.	Advertising campaign	Story and French (2004)
4.	Convenient to get from market	Kim et al. (2006)
5.	Made with more authentic methods	Sukalakamalaand Boyce (2007)
6.	Eye appealing	Namkung and Jang (2008)
7.	Promotes local tourism	Everett and Aitchison (2008)
8.	Price	Steenhuis et al. (2011)
9.	Good quality food	Nezakati et al. (2011)
10.	Less use of preservatives	Chaudhry and Castle (2011)
11.	Nutritional Value	Din et al. (2012)
12.	Calories	Block et al. (2013)

13.	Flavoursome	Zellner et al. (2014)
14.	Good economic impact on local communities	Teodoroiu (2015)
15.	Easy to prepare	Contini et al. (2016)
16.	Provides variety of food	Baiomy et al. (2019)
17.	Unique recipes	Borghini and Piras (2020)
18.	Less spicy	Racette and Drake (2022)

III. RESEARCH GAP AND PROBLEM FORMULATION: BRIDGING HERITAGE AND MODERN CONSUMERISM

Despite extensive historical documentation of Awadh and general discourse on traditional foods as cultural heritage, specific scholarly research on Awadhi cuisine's potential as a culinary tourism asset in Lucknow remains limited. A notable void exists in academic literature concerning consumer perceptions of traditional Awadhi Cuisine in Lucknow city, particularly how these perceptions are influenced by the dynamics of modernization and the diverse sociodemographic profiles of its inhabitants. This study aims to bridge this existing knowledge gap by providing an empirical analysis of these perceptions through a sociodemographic lens, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of how culinary heritage navigates the challenges and opportunities of modernity.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data were collected in September 2025 from adult residents via an online questionnaire using convenience sampling, resulting in 180 completed questionnaires from 250 potential respondents. The questionnaire was distributed through email and

hybrid digital media – instant messaging app, WhatsApp. The instrument included demographic questions, crucial for the sociodemographic analysis, and 18 perception variables on a 5-point Likert type scale. The data was processed and analyzed using SPSS 19.0. The value of Cronbach's Alpha, i.e., 0.981, confirmed the excellent internal consistency of the data.

V. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The 180 participants, representing the sociodemographic cross-section of the study, were predominantly male (66.7% male, 33.3% female), with a strong bias towards younger demographics (134 individuals in the 18-30 age group, 15.6% in 31-40, declining thereafter). A majority were unmarried (75.0% unmarried vs. 25.0% married), and education was primarily undergraduate, followed by graduate and postgraduate. Students constituted 61.1% of the occupational profile, followed by private sector employees. Income showed significant 'Not earning' respondents, consistent with student prevalence; among earners, '>₹6-10 Lakhs' was the largest segment, while '₹3-6 Lakhs' and '>₹10 Lakhs' each comprised ₹12.8%, and '<₹3 Lakh' was 10.0%.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Female	60	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Male	120	66.7	66.7	100.0
Age in Years	18- 30	134	74.4	74.4	74.4
	31-40	28	15.6	15.6	90.0
	41-50	14	7.8	7.8	97.8
	51-60	3	1.7	1.7	99.4

	Above 60	1	.6	.6	100.0
Marital Status	Unmarried	135	75.0	75.0	75.0
	Married	45	25.0	25.0	100.0
Education Qualification	Under-Graduate	93	51.7	51.7	51.7
	Graduate	41	22.8	22.8	74.4
	Post-Graduate	31	17.2	17.2	91.7
	Doctorate	13	7.2	7.2	98.9
	Others	2	1.1	1.1	100.0
Occupation	Student	110	61.1	61.1	61.1
	Government Job	28	15.6	15.6	76.7
	Private Job	33	18.3	18.3	95.0
	Homemaker	1	.6	.6	95.6
	Others	2	1.1	1.1	96.7
	Self-Employed	5	2.8	2.8	99.4
	Retired	1	.6	.6	100.0
Annual Income	Not earning	62	34.4	34.4	34.4
	<₹3 lakh	18	10.0	10.0	44.4
	₹3-6 Lakhs	23	12.8	12.8	57.2
	>₹6-10 Lakhs	54	30.0	30.0	87.2
	>₹10 Lakhs	23	12.8	12.8	100.0
	Total	180	100.0	100.0	

5.2. Descriptive Statistics of Variables Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Traditional Awadhi Food in the Modern Era

A quantitative analysis of 18 constructs, using a five-point Likert scale, revealed that Awadhi food is

perceived as "not easy to prepare" (lowest mean score, 2.98), reflecting a common challenge in modern lifestyles, and yet strongly promotes local tourism (mean score 4.11), indicating its enduring cultural and economic value.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of variables for Factor Analysis

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Analysis N
Easy to prepare	2.98	1.165	180
Made with more authentic methods	3.99	1.219	180
Unique recipes	4.01	1.155	180
Good quality food	4.09	1.174	180
Eye appealing	4.01	1.172	180
Flavoursome	4.24	1.112	180
Less spicy	3.32	1.097	180
Less use of preservatives	3.63	1.143	180
Better taste	3.97	1.281	180

Provides variety in menu	3.96	1.157	180
Convenient to get from market	3.73	1.156	180
Low price	3.22	1.203	180
High in calories	3.77	1.269	180
Good advertising campaign of Awadhi food	3.49	1.217	180
More nutritional	3.50	1.170	180
Health beneficial	3.29	1.151	180
Good economic impact on local communities	3.82	1.233	180
Promotes local tourism	4.11	1.200	180

5.3. Factor Analysis Summary of Consumer Perceptions of Awadhi Cuisine in Modern Lucknow

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (0.951) and a statistically significant

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Approx. Chi-Square = 8877.477, df = 153, Sig. = 0.000) confirmed the dataset's strong suitability for factor analysis, validating the identification of latent structures within the variables that shape contemporary consumer perceptions.

Table 4: KMO and Bartlett's Test Results

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.951
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	8877.477
	Df	153
	Sig.	0.000

High values of communalities, shown in Table 5, confirm the three-factor model's robust explanatory power, indicating substantial variability is accounted

for within consumer perceptions. Collectively, these components explain 95.847% of the total variance.

Table 5: Communalities of Variables in Factor Analysis of Consumer Perceptions of Traditional Awadhi Food

Communalities		
Variables	Initial	Extraction
Easy to prepare	1.000	.984
Made with more authentic methods	1.000	.974
Unique recipes	1.000	.967
Good quality food	1.000	.971
Eye appealing	1.000	.972
Flavoursome	1.000	.944
Less spicy	1.000	.944
Less use of preservatives	1.000	.936
Better taste	1.000	.963

Provides variety in menu	1.000	.960
Convenient to get from market	1.000	.931
Low price	1.000	.953
High in calories	1.000	.951
Good advertising campaign of Awadhi food	1.000	.963
More nutritional	1.000	.962
Health beneficial	1.000	.956
Good economic impact on local communities	1.000	.958
Promotes local tourism	1.000	.964

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 6: Total Variance Explained in Factor Analysis of Consumer Perception of Traditional Awadhi Food

Total Variance Explained				
Component	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	91.949	7.797	43.316	43.316
2	94.134	6.425	35.693	79.009
3	95.847	3.031	16.838	95.847

The Rotated Component Matrix delineates the following three factors in consumer perceptions:

Table 7: Rotated Component Matrix of Consumer Perceptions of Traditional Awadhi Food

Rotated Component Matrix ^a			
	Component		
	1	2	3
Flavoursome	.806		
Promotes local tourism	.786		
Good quality food	.785		
Made with more authentic methods	.764		
Eye appealing	.752		
Unique recipes	.746		
Better taste	.739		
Provides variety in menu	.717		
Good economic impact on local communities	.669		
High in calories	.651		
Convenient to get from market	.627		

More nutritional		.746	
Less spicy		.744	
Low price		.737	
Health beneficial		.735	
Good advertising campaign of Awadhi food		.732	
Less use of preservatives		.689	
Easy to prepare			-.827

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization^a.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Factor 1: Gastronomic Excellence and Regional Contribution (43.316% variance). This factor is defined by high positive loadings from attributes reflecting intrinsic sensory appeal, authenticity, and broader socio-economic/cultural contributions of Awadhi food. Key attributes include "Flavoursome," "Promotes local tourism," "Good quality food," "Made with more authentic methods," "Eye appealing," "Unique recipes," "Better taste," "Provides variety in menu," and "Good economic impact on local communities." "High in calories" and "Convenient to get from market" also show moderate loadings. This indicates modern consumers perceive Awadhi food as a holistic entity encompassing superior gustatory and visual qualities, traditional preparation, diverse offerings, and a significant positive regional impact. This suggests a continued appreciation for its heritage value despite societal shifts.

Factor 2: Health and Value Perception in a Modernizing Lifestyle (35.693% variance). This factor is characterized by strong positive loadings from attributes related to health perceptions ("More nutritional," "Less spicy," "Health beneficial," "Less use of preservatives") and economic accessibility/promotional effectiveness ("Low price," "Good advertising campaign of Awadhi food"). This factor suggests consumers navigating modernity integrate the food's health profile, affordability, and perceived marketing effectiveness into a singular construct. This highlights a growing awareness of health and economic considerations alongside traditional culinary values.

Factor 3: Ease of Preparation (16.838% variance). This factor is distinctly defined by a single, strong negative

loading (-.827) from "Easy to prepare." This signifies a predominant consumer perception that Awadhi food requires substantial effort, time, or skill for its preparation, representing an independent dimension reflecting practical challenges imposed by modern lifestyles.

VI. DISCUSSION: SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS INTO AWADHI CULINARY PERCEPTIONS AMIDST MODERNITY

The findings illuminate a complex interplay of perceptions among Lucknow consumers regarding traditional Awadhi cuisine, which are profoundly influenced by their sociodemographic backgrounds, particularly given the predominantly young, male, and student demographic of the sample. The strong emphasis on "Gastronomic Excellence and Regional Contribution" as the primary factor indicates that, despite the shifts brought by modernity, the intrinsic quality, unique recipes, and cultural authenticity of Awadhi food remain paramount in consumer appreciation. This suggests a continued high regard for the heritage aspect of the cuisine, which is also strongly linked to its ability to "promote local tourism" and deliver "good economic impact on local communities." The inclusion of "High in calories" and "Convenient to get from market" within this factor suggests that even with a traditional core, modern consumers, including younger segments, value both indulgence and accessibility, pointing to how heritage is consumed in contemporary life.

The "Health and Value Perception" factor reveals a growing consumer consciousness about the health

aspects of traditional foods, coupled with a desire for affordability. Attributes like "More nutritional," "Less use of preservatives," and "Health beneficial" indicate that modern consumers are not solely focused on taste but also on the perceived wellness benefits of traditional preparations. The presence of "Low price" in this factor suggests that for some sociodemographic segments, the value proposition of Awadhi food is tied to its economic accessibility, which can be a critical consideration in a diverse urban landscape. This could be particularly relevant for students and those with limited disposable income, who might seek healthier, yet affordable, traditional options, reflecting adaptation to modern economic realities.

The distinct "Ease of Preparation" factor highlights a significant practical barrier in the context of modern living. The strong negative loading on "Easy to prepare" underscores that while Awadhi cuisine is revered for its quality and authenticity, its complex and time-consuming cooking methods are a deterrent for modern consumers, particularly those with busy lifestyles or limited culinary skills. This factor directly reflects the tension between preserving traditional cooking processes and adapting to the demands of contemporary life. This perception may be more pronounced among younger, less experienced cooks or those without access to traditional household support, which is common in a rapidly modernizing urban environment, illustrating the challenges of navigating modernity through culinary practices.

VII. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study successfully identified 18 variables influencing food choices and characterized consumer perceptions of traditional Awadhi cuisine, offering a sociodemographic insight into how this heritage is received in modern Lucknow. Findings indicate Awadhi food is predominantly perceived as highly flavoursome, superior in quality, authentically prepared, possessing unique recipes, and significantly contributing to local tourism. Conversely, it is often viewed as complex to prepare and associated with a higher price point. These perceptions suggest that despite appreciation for intrinsic qualities and cultural value, convenience and cost may pose barriers, particularly for the younger, student-dominated

demographic. This research offers a data-driven analysis of consumer behavior towards traditional regional foods within the Lucknow context, navigating the complexities of modernity.

The study offers practical implications for Lucknow's hospitality and tourism sectors seeking to promote Awadhi culinary heritage in the modern era. Marketing efforts should strategically leverage high positive perceptions of authenticity, quality, unique recipes, and flavor to attract consumers seeking genuine culinary experiences. The strong association with local tourism suggests developing culinary routes, food festivals, and experiential dining opportunities, fostering collaboration between tourism boards and local businesses. Addressing the consumer perception of "complexity of preparation" could involve promoting ready-to-cook traditional Awadhi food kits or conducting culinary workshops to demystify traditional methods. Similarly, strategic pricing models could enhance accessibility without compromising perceived value, especially to cater to different income groups highlighted in the sociodemographic analysis, thereby ensuring the cuisine's relevance in a modern market.

The study's reliance on convenience sampling, with a predominance of young, male, and student respondents, limits generalizability across all sociodemographic segments of Lucknow. Therefore, future research should employ other sampling techniques to ensure broader representation. Future research could investigate the impact of specific marketing strategies, such as geographical indication or heritage branding, on consumer acceptance and willingness to pay across different sociodemographic groups. Additionally, longitudinal studies could track changes in consumer perceptions over time as modernization continues to influence dietary habits and cultural values, providing a more dynamic understanding of how Awadhi culinary heritage is navigated by its people.

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